

An Industry-wide Approach to Environmental Responsibility

The mailing industry is a vital component to the world economy. Its importance as a unique communications channel is vast. But, like so many other critically important industries in today's marketplace, an environmental strategy is becoming a business priority. Key stakeholders now demand environmental accountability and transparency within an organization's total operations. Mailers must respond favorably to stakeholder demand in order to maintain a "license to operate" and "license to sell".

Consumer misperception of the environmental impact of mail is a challenge that mailers need to address when communicating an environmental strategy and improvement programs. In fact, a 2007 Pitney Bowes/*DM News* Survey showed that 48 percent of consumers believe that advertising mail constitutes 53 percent of the total municipal waste in the U.S. The correct answer, 2 percent of the total municipal waste, was chosen by only 2 percent of respondents.

The mailing industry faces several inherent challenges in reducing its environmental impact, as do all industries. Mailers and the mailing industry as a whole, have been working on environmental programs and studies that will accelerate an environmentally conscious transformation. One example includes a collaborative effort by leaders in the mailing industry and Five Winds International, a multidisciplinary sustainability-management consultant, to assess and share best practices already occurring within the industry.¹

The sharing of best practices helps the mailing industry identify, analyze and act on initiatives that will ensure that mail is sustainable. For example, the industry seizes the opportunity to reduce the resources and waste generated by mail with bad addresses, especially when the USPS reports that returned mail can account for 2 percent of a company's mail volume.

In addition to analyzing current environmental impact, mailers are developing business relationships with key industry associations, like the Direct Marketing Association (DMA) to uniformly address unwanted mail and target areas within the life cycle of mail that have potential for increased environmental benefits. The DMA "Green 15" calls upon member organizations to deliver 15 baseline business practices that reduce environmental impact. The USPS' "Greening of the Mail" Task Force also serves to address areas within the life cycle of mail that reduce its environmental impact. When mailers participate in these environmentally-conscious initiatives, it sends a clear message to consumers that interests are aligned.

In terms of promotional mail, the DMA's U.S. Mail Preference Service (MPS), part of DMAChoice, is a creative solution. This service provides consumers with the opportunity to select the amount and type of promotional mail received at home. The service seems to resonate with consumers who use it, with 43 percent of them describing its use as a positive experience, according to the Pitney Bowes/*DM News* Survey.

Communicating the value and benefits associated with the mailstream is an important priority for mailers in today's marketplace. With direct links to the economy in commerce and communications, the mailing industry must address concerns with the environmental impact of the mailstream, while maintaining the critical services that it provides.

¹ *Best Practices: Understanding Environmental Stewardship Best Practices in the Mailstream*
Five Winds International (November, 2007).

